

Scripture: Psalm 139:1-14

Sermon Title: "One by One"

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A Sunday or two ago, a pastor friend of mine was sitting in her office that morning before worship, getting ready for all that the day would bring. There with her was her faithful companion – a therapy dog who has become effectively a co-pastor of the congregation. Now, every Sunday, a member of the church who, it would seem, finds particular healing in being around this dog, comes and walks her before the worship service begins. On this particular Sunday, it happened to be raining, and so the man took an umbrella with him as he took the dog for a walk – this weekly event which it would seem has become a spiritual practice of sorts for him. A minute or two after they left her office, the pastor happened to glance out the window into the rainy day and saw her dog and this man walking by on the sidewalk on that dreary morning. The man was holding the umbrella as they walked in the rain, but he was not holding it over himself. He was holding it over the dog. And as rain poured down, drenching the man, soaking him to the bone, he continued to cover the dog and kept her dry.

When we hear such a story or when we witness such beautiful ways of being in the world, it certainly gives a lot of hope for humanity, doesn't it? Still, it's more than that. As my friend so eloquently put it, "it is the small acts of everyday kindness that make the world a better place." And it is, I believe, through and by such individual acts that the world changes. With every act of care and compassion, one by one, the world becomes a better place.

Now, this may sound like a "pie in the sky" hope or dream – that something so small can change the world. After all, when we look around at the world as a whole, it can easily become overwhelming. The problems, the needs, the injustices of this world are, in fact, many. When we consider global hunger, civil unrest, the violations of basic human rights, we see BIG problems which need BIG solutions. And when we look at these big problems, it's easy to dismiss the effectiveness and the life-changing and

world-changing ability of the little things – of those small acts. Still, I believe that there is a power in such a way of being in the world. That there is power in these small, individual acts which change the world one life at a time, one day at a time, one moment at a time. To be present in the moment, to be present in the individual lives around us, to be present in the things that can seem small and, through those actions of care and compassion, we impact the moment, the individual, the small things for the better. The more we are faithful in that and the more of us doing that, the bigger the impact on our world will be.

Again, I know this may sound like a grand vision of the impossible, but I think it is true. After all, it is through such individual care that God has touched the world. It is through the act of being so very faithful in the small things, that the world was formed. That creations took shape. That we found breath within ourselves. In our scripture reading today, the Psalmist reminds us of the individual attention, the individual care that God gives each of us. The psalmist reminds us that God knows us. That there is no place where we can go and not be held in the love of God. That we were even formed by God with such care as of a knitter, making each stitch count, being mindful throughout the process of the creation being formed and putting a piece of Gods-self into that very creation. You know, I realize that we are often too humble to admit just how special we are, just how significant we are to God, but today we are reminded of that in our reading. Even in the vastness of our universe, in the grandness of our world, among all people and places, we are still cherished in such an intimate way for we are significant. And in turn, everyone around us, every aspect of creation in which God has also taken so much care and gives so much attention to, they are significant as well. When we hear the words of the psalmist today, we are reminded once again of this individual care. As God's creations, we are loved and cherished one by one.

In the offering from our choir this morning, we too reflect on all the ways in which God, and God through Jesus Christ, has continued to impact the world, one by one. That in Jesus' ministry, there was that individual care, of seeing the person, reaching out and

touching their lives, seeing their tears, knowing their pain, joining them on the journey, and changing their world. And while what Jesus was offering was so much more beyond the individual, for the love and grace shared in his life is there to touch and change the whole world, through it all then and still today, there is that individual connection and care.

When we acknowledge this, we see the power in the little things. When we care for someone else, when we speak hope into another's life, when we live kindness, we live that individual care which God shows us and we in turn show one another. I think we see the effectiveness and the power in caring for the individual even when we tackle the bigger problems in the world. When donating to a cause which seeks to end hunger, supporting an organization which is striving for a cure, or any effort to make big, long-lasting change in our world, we still long for individual stories. Even though we are supporting something so much beyond any one individual, it is still those stories which touch our hearts and encourage us. When we know at least one person who is being helped, when we get a picture of one life being changed, generosity often increases because we want to know that what we are doing is changing the situation, the circumstances, changing the life of the individual. Why? Why does knowing the story of just one person affect us so much? I think it goes back to being made with such care. To be so known by our God has impacted our very being and I think has made us want to know others in the same way as we live out our faith.

We know that the world needs some big change. This is made so very clear when we look at the needs and the hurts which fill society today. And as follows of Jesus, we are called into this world changing work. Still, as we see from God and from our Christ, this work takes root in the hearts of individuals, and we effect change in lives often one by one. I know, at times, it may not feel like enough, still if we look at every encounter in our day, every gift that we give, and every word that we say as an opportunity to bring about positive change in the life of another, there's a lot of good being created in the

world. And this goodness has a rippling effect, for it sparks change in the heart of yet another.

There is a song and a hymn that is popular often in camps settings which I really love. It's called "Pass it On". The first verse says this, "It only takes a spark to get a fire going. And soon all those around, can warm up in its glowing. That's how it is with God's love, once you've experienced it, you spread God's love to ev'ryone, you want to pass it on". Now, this may sound very simple and as anyone who has started a campfire knows, one spark does not always ensure a roaring fire, still, it's where it will eventually start. In our lives of discipleship, each act of love and care may not initiate the change we long for in our world, but eventually, one spark of care will lead to that fire of love in another, and another, and another.

Beloved People of God, today we remember that one by one, we were made - loved so much and known so deeply by our God. That in that same care, our lives have been touched by Jesus. May we echo such care as we too, one by one, in every act of compassion, in every spark of love, in every life touched, help make and seek a more just world for all. So be it and may it be so. Amen.